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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research was to find out if libraries across the country have applied for and received Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) grants to fund latchkey programs. Through the use of a questionnaire sent to all of the state library agencies in the United States, data was collected by structured and open-ended questions. The results of this study show that the use of LSCA funds for latchkey programs is still a fairly new and untapped source. Only 6 of the 39 state libraries that responded had received and approved LSCA grants for latchkey programming. A majority of the states are aware that there are problems in the public libraries because of latchkey children, but these libraries have not gone to their state libraries for help. Brief program descriptions of latchkey programs are included by state. The questionnaire administered in the study is found in the appendix. (Author/JLB)

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A SURVEY OF LSCA FUNDING FOR LATCHKEY PROGRAMS IN PUBILC LIBRARIES

A Master's Research Paper submitted to the
Kent State University School of Library Science
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Master of Library Science

by

Susan Harbaugh

November, 1990

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research was to find out if libraries across the country have applied for and received LSCA grants to fund latchkey programs. Through the use of a questionnaire sent to all of the state library agencies in the United States, data was collected by structured and open-ended questions. The results of this study shows that the use of LSCA funds for latchkey programs is still a fairly new and untapped source. Only six of the thirty-nine state libraries that responded had received and approved LSCA grants for latchkey programming. A majority of the states are aware that there are problems in the public libraries because of latchkey children but these public libraries have not gone to their state libraries for help. The programs submitted by the states with the grants were all good ideas that other libraries could benefit from. This data on program ideas and funding should be made available to libraries across the country who are in need of help.

Master's Research Paper by

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B.S., Manchester College, 1969

M.L.S., Kent State University, 1990

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Adviser Date 4/14/90

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INTRODUCTION

Unattended children who use the public library for other reasons than materials selection, information, and cultural enrichment have always been present in libraries. Changes in our society such as more working mothers, the lack of older adults available to baby-sit in neighborhoods, and the unavailability of affordable childcare have led to an increase of children using the public library for shelter after school. Many parents look at the library as a safe and free haven.

Many libraries have been unprepared to handle this surge of youth. It places an extra burden on the library's staffing, resources, and programming. Controversy arises when service to this group of children both coincides and conflicts with the very mission of the public library. A public library's mission is to assure free access to all patrons which includes children. But many librarians do not feel their role is that of a baby-sitter and many also feel that service to other patrons will be hurt when so much of their time must be spent supervising these "latchkey kids" who are found using areas of the library other than the children's department.

The unattended child is such an important area of study that it is now the topic of library conference

meetings across the nation. There were two very current programs presented at the 1989 American Library Convention in Dallas, Texas.

At this convention and in recent literature it was noted that only one study has been conducted nationwide on this problem in the public library. It was suggested at this time that more studies are needed to assess what is happening in our libraries when dealing with the latchkey situation. More research is needed as a follow-up to see how well the programs developed for latchkey children have worked in the libraries that have instituted them. Research in this area is new and open for many avenues of study. To be able to serve these "new" patrons, more study is needed to help librarians define their role.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Many librarians have implemented programming and service to meet the needs of this group of patrons. This extra work requires extra funding. The goal of this research is to find out if libraries across the country have applied for and received LSCA grants to fund latchkey programs.

The Library Services and Construction Act(LSCA) provides federal funds to promote library service to rural, urban, and suburban areas with inadequate service.(Prentice 1977, 14) To receive a full share of funds, a state needs to provide matching funds. Individual libraries when applying for the LSCA grant must apply through the state library agency. The state library then reviews the application in the light of state library planning.

Questions that need to be answered by this study are:

1. Has the growing problem of unattended children in public libraries affected services in many states?

2. Are there latchkey programs in the public libraries of the states surveyed?

3. Have any public libraries applied for funding under the LSCA grant for latchkey programs?

4. If funding has been applied for, how many have been approved and how many have been rejected?

5. Of those approved and implemented, how successful were they?

It is also the goal of this paper to make the results known to libraries across the country which are looking for ideas for funding to help improve their service to the unattended children in their libraries.

LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study could be the bias found in the answers to the open-ended questions. This comes from the phenomenon of only highly opinionated respondents answering questionnaires. It is hoped that the questionnaire layout and importance of the study will alleviate this problem.

There is also the disadvantage of mailed questionnaires and their return rate. The cover letter, self-addressed stamped envelope, time of the year sent, and a well formatted questionnaire will help eliminate some of this problem.

LITERATURE SEARCH

Unattended children have been defined as "latchkey children" because many wear a key to the house around their necks. A "library latchkey child" has been definded by the San Marino(California) Public Library as a child who on a regular basis is required by his/her parent or guardian to remain at the public library for extended periods of time after school in place of daycare. "Regular period" is defined as two or more hours per day.(Young 1988, 197)

Most of these unsupervised children fall into the elementary school age group, although the total number can be divided into preschoolers, elementary school age, and young adolescents. The number of preschoolers is small because many libraries have adopted policies that specify that young children must not be left unattended.

The impact of the "latchkey child" has hit community agencies such as schools and community centers as well as public libraries. The response to this is being met daily with new programs and services in the community. These responses have been found on both the national and local level. Examples of non-library programs follow.

Schools have set up child care in their elementary schools before and after school. Salem, Oregon has a

"School-Age Child Care Project" and several elementary schools are used for this purpose in the Worthington and Upper Arlington school districts of Columbus, Ohio. Project Home Safe: Children in Self-Care is a program sponsored by the Whirlpool Foundation in cooperation with the American Home Economics Association. Home economists are trained to go out in their community and help agencies survey their communities and set up school-age care programs to fit the need they find there.(Dowd 1988, 6) Another program is "Phone Friend: A Prevention-Oriented Service for Latchkey Children." Volunteers take calls from latchkey children who are alone in their homes.(Guerney 1983) In Fairfax, Virginia a survey of the community resulted in a program entitled Family Day Care Check-In. It is designed for preadolescent children. Children check-in at a neighborhood home with a trained, family day care provider. With permission the child can spend some of their time at home and at other activities after checking in with the provider.(McKnight 1984)

The above programs were community responses to the parent's needs for day care and they seem to work well so far. But many parents rely on the public library as their after school provider. As a public institution, the library is seen as an acceptable alternative to expensive day care. Like it or not public librarians must meet this challenge by forming policies and implementing programs.

The first response by many public librarians was very

negative. These librarians were frightened and in desperation they quickly drew up negative policies and posted signs warning that children under certain ages must be accompanied by an adult. In Atlanta, Georgia signs were posted in public libraries warning parents they could face criminal charges of child abandonment. A policy statement in the Montgomery County, Maryland Public Library warns that it considers it a form of "child neglect" for children under 13 to be left unattended for long periods of time or not picked up at closing.(Noble 1988) Newspaper articles across the country focused attention on these negative aspects. These hasty policies were intended to protect libraries from liability. This may be seen as creating the false impression that the library no longer wants to serve children.

As the issue calmed down, more positive responses began to show up in the literature. One positive response is the position paper published in 1988 by the Services to Children Committee of the Public Library Association(PLA). This paper explains a model policy development process, suggests programs to meet the needs of these children and offers suggestions to prevent public libraries from becoming part of, rather than a solution to, the problem of unsupervised children. This paper also states that the children are not at fault and public libraries risk destroying their history of service unless they treat the "latchkey children issue as one that offers unparalled

opportunities for community networking and the provision of vital information services within the historical mission of the institution."(Young 1988, 196)

As a result of this position paper, positive thinking by today's librarians, and conference meetings more solutions are being found to meet the needs of latchkey children in our public libraries. Positive strategies also include staff development training and a "child friendly" management plan. The community must be surveyed and analyzed so as not to duplicate other programs and to find volunteers willing to help with programming.

In northwest Ohio libraries are meeting the needs of latchkey children in different ways. At Middlefield Public Library a meeting room was opened after school as a kind of social interaction area. There is a TV for their use and a minimal rules of behavior sign has been posted. The Warren-Trumbull County Public Library has adopted a "Child Safety at the Library" policy which addresses the issue of liability and the public's perception of the library as acting parents. When parents sign for a library card for their children under age eighteen, they are given a copy of the policy. It emphasizes the library's welcome to children while pointing out parental responsibility for a child's behavior.(Rome 1990)

Huntsville-Madison Co., Alabama has a new library near a housing development. Many latchkey children make their way to the library after school each day. They had

disruptive behavior until they set forth the philosophy that librarians must get involved. Their unwritten policy even includes assisting children with their homework. The director states that "the answer lies somewhere between depriving them of their rights as library patrons and being a day-care center."(Fuga 1988, 90)

An exemplary national example is a project conducted by the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science and ACTION (a federal domestic volunteer program). A Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) was formed. The volunteers assist understaffed libraries in identifying the children's needs and then responding to them by presenting educational and book-related programs and activities to these children.(Dowd 1988)

To help in clarifying what the role for librarians in serving this new population of children is, a national survey was conducted in the summer of 1988 by Dr. Francis Dowd, Assistant Professor at the School of Library and Information Studies, Texas Woman's University. This research is the only national study documented at this time on the topic. The goal was to assist public libraries in clarifying their appropriate role in serving latchkey children and to develop recommendations for more effective service to these children.

Dr. Dowd gave a list of five recommendations based upon her findings to help librarians clarify their role and facilitate more effective service to latchkey children:

1. Public library personnel should be better educated regarding appropriate services to latchkey children.
2. Public libraries should develop and publicize specific non-negative worded written policies and procedures for dealing with latchkey children.
3. Public librarians should re-evaluate their present programs/services available for latchkey children and their parents.
4. Public librarians should become actively involved in some type of community-sponsored committee/board/task force composed of representatives from neighborhood agencies.
5. Additional research on the topic of latchkey children in public libraries is warranted. (Dowd 1989a, 24)

The above recommendations and the lack of a local coalition of libraries and community organizations in the United States had led to this decision to conduct a survey of State Library agencies. The purpose is to survey what is the present status of funded programs dealing with latchkey children. The assumptions this study attempted to prove is that state and federal funding is being proposed and implemented to provide better latchkey programming in areas with inadequate service to these patrons. This research can also be helpful to librarians across the country that are being faced with the lack of funding for the programs they wish to provide and are in need of answers as to what their next step should be in this area.

METHODOLOGY

The data was collected by a questionnaire consisting of structured and open-ended questions sent to all of the State Library agencies across the United States. Questions were answered pertaining to the use of LSCA funds in latchkey programming. The sequence of questions followed the order from general to specific. The questionnaire was mailed along with a self-addressed stamped envelope and a cover letter. The approximate length was three pages. Addresses of the State Libraries were obtained from the ALA Directory.

The first draft of the questionnaire was composed keeping in mind the respondents who answered and the answers needed to shed light on the problem being dealt with. In the conclusion, there was a thank you and repeat instructions on when it should be returned.

A cover letter was written next explaining the need for this research. The respondents were told that the results would be available to other libraries across the country in need of suggestions for latchkey funding.

The questionnaire was sent out the second week of September. It was asked that the answers be returned by October 1. This time was used as a time when Summer Reading Club results should be almost finished and before the fall conferences and holiday season.

The questionnaire was sent to the children's services coordinator of the State Library using their personal name, if known. If there was no children's services coordinator, then it was sent to the director of the State Library.

A follow-up letter and a second copy of the questionnaire was mailed to those who did not respond to the initial mailing. This was done one week after the first deadline. The respondents were to return this questionnaire in ten days.

Data collected from the structured questions of the returned questionnaires was converted into frequencies and percentages. This was conducted with a computer with a statistical package. Tables were generated to represent results of the data. The open-ended questions were reviewed and percentages of like answers calculated by the researcher.

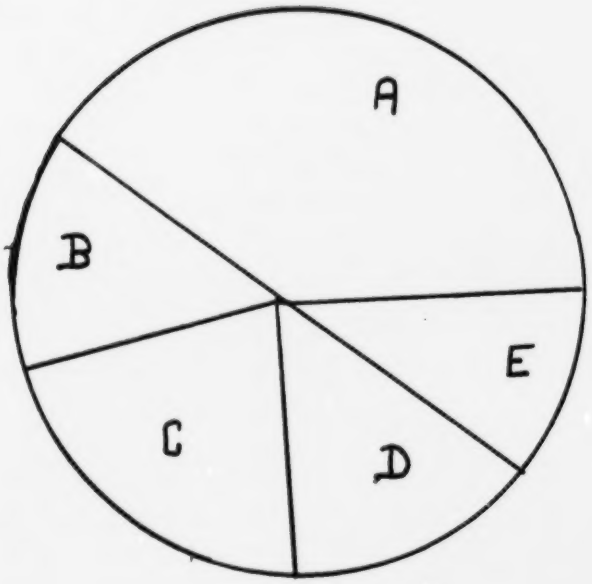
RESULTS

The questionnaire was sent out as planned to the fifty state libraries the second week in September requesting that results be returned by October 1. By the week of the deadline, 23 surveys had been returned. The second letter was sent out early in October requesting returns by October 15. This second mailing resulted in 16 more surveys, giving a total of 39 usable returned questionnaires. This was a 78 percent return rate. The majority that returned early were from less populated states that reported latchkeys as a minor or nonexistant problem. The states with larger populations sent later and several did not respond. One large state even sent a memo stating that a "few minutes" was not even possible in their understaffed organization to fill out the questionnaire.

A majority of respondents (64 percent) felt that the growing problem of unattended/latchkey children in public libraries affected services in their state. Figure 1 illustrates the responses to this question. There were 18 (46 percent) answers that saw latchkeys as a major concern. They stressed how policies had been adopted because of discipline problems of these unattended children after school and at closing. Several added that

TABLE NO. 1

ATTITUDE TOWARD LATCHKEY PROBLEMS



A 41% MAJOR CONCERN

B 16% MINOR PROBLEM

C 18% NO PROBLEM

D 14% DO NOT KNOW

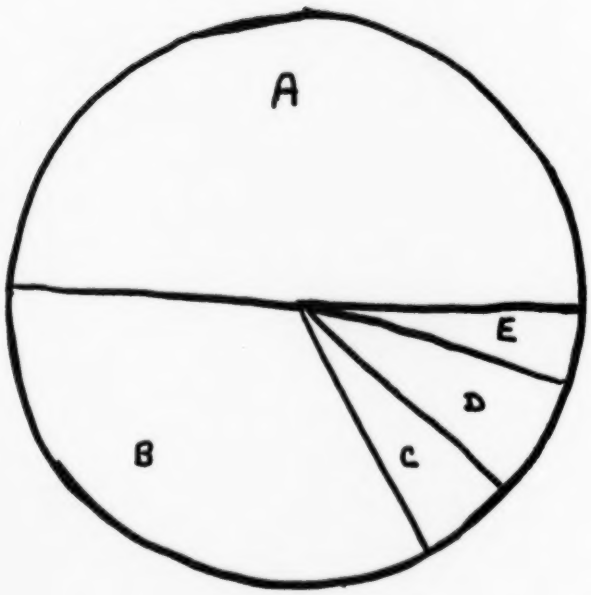
E 11% NO ANSWER

libraries have also responded with programs and special activities for this segment of the population. A smaller group of 7 (18 percent) respondents felt that their states were affected with problems on a minor level. Most of these answers came from states that were primarily rural but did not have the problem in their larger metropolitan areas. Of the respondents 3 (8 percent) saw no problem in their states, because none had been reported to them or, as in one state, a survey taken last year indicated that there was no serious problem at this time. Six (15 percent) of the librarians answered that they did not know if there was a problem and 5 (12 percent) gave no answer.

The respondents were then asked if they were aware of any latchkey programs held in the public libraries in their states. The responses to this question are found in Figure 2. Answers from 19 (49 percent) states stated that they were aware of latchkey programs in their state. A majority of these respondents only knew of a few programs in each state, though, when answering with more than yes. Only one state was aware of many programs of this type. One library started an after school program which generated a small state legislative appropriation. Two libraries in this state are currently conducting pilot projects with these state funds. Of the respondents, 13 (33 percent) simply stated no to the question and 3 (8 per cent) were not aware of any specifically identified as latchkey programs. Two

TABLE NO. 2

LATCHKEY PROGRAMS ?



A 49% YES

B 33% NO

C 5% NO ANSWER

D 8% NOT IDENTIFIED

E 5% UNKNOWN

respondents (5 percent) gave no answer and another 2 (5 percent) said the answer was unknown at this level.

The next question, concerned public libraries within the state having applied for funding under the LSCA grant for latchkey programs. Only six libraries could answer yes. This was only 12 percent of the respondents. Of the no answers given, a few gave explainations. As stated above, one library has latchkey money from state grants. They are used in-house to fund statewide services such as interlibrary loans, videos, films, reference, etc. One answer stated that there is no specific LSCA title for latchkey programming. Another respondent felt that although they did not have any specific LSCA grants for latchkey programs, some LSCA funds may be used for latchkeys. This state has many LSCA enrichment grant programs that are used for children's materials and services.

The six states which answered yes to the question are Colorado, Florida, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, and Wisconsin. The number of grants that were accepted by their state agencies ranged from one to five. All that were requested were approved by the state agencies. All that were sent to the federal government were also approved. (In one state, two requested for 1991 had not been sent to the federal government at the time of this survey.) The following are descriptions of the LSCA funded latchkey programs:

Ohio's one program is called "Key to Learning: Key to Fun!". It is housed in the community center at a small branch library. It was designed to provide homework assistance as well as to offer fun for latchkey children after school. Books, games, and computers were offered.

Wisconsin asked for their grant in 1984. It involved after school programming in four branch libraries. The programs varied and ran for eight weeks. It was a learning process that has helped this state with other latchkey programming efforts.

Colorado's one program is located in a small, rural town. This project provides children with movies and special programming each month. It also provides these children with additional paperbacks.

New York has a program that recently began its second year in a suburb of New York City. Three days each week, for two hours each day, a special program is offered. The first hour is devoted to homework assistance and the second hour is recreational (storytelling, crafts, games, art projects, etc.).

In South Carolina two programs have been implemented and one has been approved for 1991 that is not specifically targeted to latchkeys but which has them in mind as one objective. The first grant in use provides programs for children by many agencies in the community to help children with coping skills and distribute materials. The money also went to purchase library materials which relate to

these skills. The second grant coordinated a volunteer program called LARC (Learn and Read Club) in which senior citizens and others met children in the library after school for "you read to me, I'll read to you" and other activities with books.

Florida listed three programs (one in 1989 and two in 1990). Two more will be submitted soon for 1991. In 1989 "Project Latchkey" was formed to provide coping skills for crisis situations. These programs used multi-media necessitating the establishment of a viewing/listening center. In 1990 "Project Latchkey" was expanded to a coastal region library focusing on coping skills needed by children when they are without adult supervision. The second grant for 1990 was called "The 3 O'clock Club: After-School Program for Latchkey Children". The activities in this program include development for library policies, staff training, parent packet of library and community services, participant survey, and after-school programs/activities.

All of the programs have been successful. Several respondents added names and addresses of people to contact who worked closly with the programs.

CONCLUSIONS

This survey proved that although many states are aware of latchkey children and the problems they can create in libraries after school, only a few libraries have gone to the state level for extra funding to help with the situation. The state libraries (especially in states with large metropolitian areas) are aware that there are problems and programs in their libraries but only one state has conducted a survey to ascertain if their state had a serious enough problem to require extra help. When 27 percent did not even know if there were problems or did not answer, this shows a major lack of concern as to how their public libraries are affected with this nationwide problem. The answers received in this survey show a strong lack of interest in the children's area of public libraries on the state level. This was also shown in the small amount of children's services coordinators listed in the American Library Directory. The last two statements can possibly lead to the conclusion that public libraries do not ask for funding from the state level because they know children's services are not a high priority with their state libraries.

Those states where funds were asked for found the funds available. The local public libraries were able to

implement exciting programs for children that were well received. These were all good programs with ideas that other libraries could benefit from. The respondents who knew of LSCA grants were enthusiastic about the programs in their states and even gave names of others who might have more information on the programs. This gives a conclusion that there is money out there for latchkey programs when grants are applied for in states that are interested in children's services. The federal government is willing to fund these programs (100 percent so far).

In the future as the problem of latchkey children grows, more LSCA funding may find its way to local public libraries for this need. LSCA funding for latchkeys is in its infancy (the first one requested was in 1984). A follow-up survey a few years from now may find different results.

One limitation involved with this study was the type of envelopes used. The first mailing was sent out in slightly oversized envelopes so as not to be bulky. There was only a decent return rate. The second was sent in regular business sized envelopes. Many came back stating they had just received the survey on their desk after the second mailing. This gives the conclusion that the larger envelopes may be treated as junk mail and not opened. Business sized envelopes receive more attention.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Librarians need to be made aware of the fact that applying for an LSCA grant might be a good way to pursue funding when they have exhausted all resources locally. Consequently, state librarians need to be made aware when there are problems of this nature in their state's public libraries. They should also, if at all possible, be more open to searching with their public librarians for this funding help. Children's services needs more recognition at the state level.

APPENDICES

Susan Harbaugh
419 West Main Street
Troy, Ohio 45373
513-339-0502

Survey of Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA) Funding for Latchkey Programs in Public Libraries

September 8, 1990

Dear Friend:

Enclosed is a simple survey which is being sent to all state libraries in the United States. The study is attempting to document the importance of LSCA grants to latchkey programming and services in each state. Are these funds being used to assist libraries in designing creative, positive, and effective methods for dealing with latchkey children? I am sure you will agree that this problem in our public libraries has caused us to ponder what our role is in serving these children.

Please take a few minutes out of your busy schedule to answer these questions so that we may pass on ideas for funding to other libraries that are in need of ideas for help. If you do not feel you are the right person to complete this survey, please pass it on to the appropriate person with this cover letter.

The results of this study will be available for publication, and if you would like to receive a copy of the results, note this on your questionnaire.

Please return this questionnaire in the enclosed stamped self-addressed envelope by October 1. If you have any questions regarding this survey, feel free to give me a call. I am also a student of the Kent State School of Library Science, and you may call the school (216-672-2782) if you have concerns about this survey.

Thank you for assisting in this much needed research.

Yours truly,

Susan Harbaugh

Susan Harbaugh

A SURVEY OF LSCA FUNDING FOR LATCHKEY PROGRAMS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Please help public libraries improve their service to unattended/latchkey children by completing this questionnaire as accurately and completely as possible.

1. **Has the growing problem of unattended/latchkey children in public libraries effected services in your state? If so, in what ways?**

2. **Are there latchkey programs in public libraries in your state of which you are aware?**

3. **Have any public libraries in your state applied for funding under the LSCA grant for latchkey programs?**

4. **If so, how many were accepted by your state agency?**

5. **How many were approved for grants from the federal government?**

6. **Were any latchkey proposals rejected by your agency?**

7. **If so, how many were rejected and why?**

8. **Were any latchkey program proposals rejected at the federal level and if so, why?**

9. **Will you briefly list and describe any latchkey programs funded by LSCA grants in your state?**

10. **Have these programs been successful?**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return your answers in the stamped envelope by **OCTOBER 1.**